



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

AN OPEN LETTER TO ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.

DEAR SIR : I am glad that I know you, even though some of my brethren look upon you as a monster because of your unbelief. I shall never forget the long evening I spent at your house in Washington ; and in what I have to say, however it may fail to convince you, I trust you will feel that I have not shown myself unworthy of your courtesy or confidence.

Your conversation then and at other times interested me greatly. I recognized at once the elements of your power over large audiences, in your wit and dramatic talent—personating characters and imitating tones of voice and expressions of countenance—and your remarkable use of language, which even in familiar talk often rose to a high degree of eloquence. All this was a keen intellectual stimulus. I was for the most part a listener, but as we talked freely of religious matters, I protested against your unbelief as utterly without reason. Yet there was no offence given or taken, and we parted, I trust, with a feeling of mutual respect.

Still further, we found many points of sympathy. I do not hesitate to say that there are many things in which I agree with you, in which I love what you love and hate what you hate. A man's hatreds are not the least important part of him ; they are among the best indications of his character. You love truth, and hate lying and hypocrisy—all the petty arts and deceits of the world by which men represent themselves to be other than they are—as well as the pride and arrogance, in which they assume superiority over their fellow-beings. Above all, you hate every form of injustice and oppression. Nothing moves your indignation so much as "man's inhumanity to man," and you mutter "curses not loud but deep" on the whole race of tyrants and oppressors, whom you would sweep from the face of the earth. And yet you do not hate oppression more than I, nor love liberty more.

Nor will I admit that you have any stronger desire for that intellectual freedom, to the attainment of which you look forward as the last and greatest emancipation of mankind.

Nor have you a greater horror of superstition. Indeed, I might say that you cannot have so great, for the best of all reasons, that you have not seen so much of it ; you have not stood on the banks of the Ganges, and seen the Hindoos by tens of thousands rushing madly to throw themselves into the sacred river, even carrying the ashes of their dead to cast them upon the waters. It seems but yesterday that I was sitting on the back of an elephant, looking down on this horrible scene of human degradation. Such superstition overthrows the very foundations of morality. In place of the natural sense of right and wrong, which is written in men's consciences and hearts, it introduces an artificial standard, by which the order of things is totally reversed : right is made wrong, and wrong is made right. It makes that a virtue which is not a virtue, and that a crime which is not a crime. Religion consists in a round of observances that have no relation whatever to natural goodness, but which rather exclude it by being a substitute for it. Penances and pilgrimages take the place of justice and mercy, benevolence and charity. Such a religion, so far from being a purifier, is the greatest corrupter of morals ; so that it is no extravagance to say of the Hindoos, who are a gentle race, that they might be virtuous and good if they were not so religious. But this colossal superstition weighs upon their very existence, crushing out even natural virtue. Such a religion is an immeasurable curse.

I hope this language is strong enough to satisfy even your own intense hatred of superstition. You cannot loathe it more than I do. So far we agree perfectly. But unfortunately you do not limit your crusade to the religions of Asia, but turn the same style of argument against the religion of Europe and America, and, indeed, against the religious belief and worship of every country and clime. In this matter you make no distinctions : you would sweep them all away ; church and cathedral must go with the temple and the pagoda, as alike manifestations of human credulity, and proofs of the intellectual feebleness and folly of mankind. While under the impression of that memorable evening at your house, I took up some of your public addresses, and experienced a strange revulsion of feeling. I could hardly be-

lieve my eyes as I read, so inexpressibly was I shocked. Things which I held sacred you not only rejected with unbelief, but sneered at with contempt. Your words were full of a bitterness so unlike anything I had heard from your lips, that I could not reconcile the two, till I reflected that in Robert Ingersoll (as in the most of us) there were two men, who were not only distinct, but contrary the one to the other—the one gentle and sweet-tempered ; the other delighting in war as his native element. Between the two, I have a decided preference for the former. I have no dispute with the quiet and peaceable gentleman, whose kindly spirit makes sunshine in his home ; but it is *that other man* over yonder, who comes forward into the arena like a gladiator, defiant and belligerent, that rouses my antagonism. And yet I do not intend to *stand up* even against him ; but if he will only *sit down* and listen patiently, and answer in those soft tones of voice which he knows so well how to use, we can have a quiet talk, which will certainly do him no harm, while it relieves my troubled mind.

What then is the basis of this religion which you despise ? At the foundation of every form of religious faith and worship, is the idea of God. Here you take your stand ; you do not believe in God. Of course you do not deny absolutely the existence of a Creative Power : for that would be to assume a knowledge which no human being can possess. How small is the distance that we can see before us ! The candle of our intelligence throws its beams but a little way, beyond which the circle of light is compassed by universal darkness. Upon this no one insists more than yourself. I have heard you discourse upon the insignificance of man in a way to put many preachers to shame. I remember your illustration from the myriads of creatures that live on plants, from which you picked out, to represent human insignificance, an insect too small to be seen by the naked eye, whose world was a leaf, and whose life lasted but a single day ! Surely a creature that can only be seen with a microscope, cannot *know* that a Creator does not exist !

This, I must do you the justice to say, you do not affirm. All that you can say is, that if there be no knowledge on one side, neither is there on the other ; that it is only a matter of probability ; and that, judging from such evidence as appeals to your senses and your understanding, you do not *believe* that there is a

God. Whether this be a reasonable conclusion or not, it is at least an intelligible state of mind.

Now I am not going to argue against what the Catholics call "invincible ignorance"—an incapacity on account of temperament—for I hold that the belief in God, like the belief in all spiritual things, comes to some minds by a kind of intuition. There are natures so finely strung that they are sensitive to influences which do not touch others. You may say that it is mere poetical rhapsody when Shelley writes :

" The awful shadow of some unseen power
Floats, though unseen, among us."

But there are natures which are not at all poetical or dreamy, only most simple and pure, which, in moments of spiritual exaltation, are almost *conscious* of a Presence that is not of this world. But this, which is a matter of experience, will have no weight with those who do not have that experience. For the present, therefore, I would not be swayed one particle by mere sentiment, but look at the question in the cold light of reason alone.

The idea of God is indeed the grandest and most awful that can be entertained by the human mind. Its very greatness overpowers us, so that it seems impossible that such a Being should exist. But if it is hard to conceive of Infinity, it is still harder to get any intelligible explanation of the present order of things without admitting the existence of an intelligent Creator and Up-holder of all. Copernicus, when he swept the sky with his telescope, traced the finger of God in every movement of the heavenly bodies. Napoleon, when the French savants on the voyage to Egypt argued that there was no God, disdained any other answer than to point upward to the stars and ask, "Who made all these?" That is the first question, and it is the last. The farther we go, the more we are forced to one conclusion. No man ever studied nature with a more simple desire to know the truth than Agassiz, and yet the more he explored, the more he was startled as he found himself constantly face to face with the evidences of MIND.

Do you say this is "a great mystery," meaning that it is something that we do not know anything about? Of course, it is "a mystery." But do you think to escape mystery by denying the Divine existence? You only exchange one mystery for another.

The first of all mysteries is, not that God exists, but that *we* exist. Here we are. How did we come here? We go back to our ancestors; but that does not take away the difficulty; it only removes it farther off. Once begin to climb the stairway of past generations, and you will find that it is a Jacob's ladder, on which you mount higher and higher until you step into the very presence of the Almighty.

But even if we know that there is a God, what can we know of His character? You say, "God is whatever we conceive Him to be." We frame an image of Deity out of our consciousness—it is simply a reflection of our own personality cast upon the sky, like the image seen in the Alps in certain states of the atmosphere—and then fall down and worship that which we have created, not indeed with our hands, but out of our minds. This may be true to some extent of the gods of mythology, but not of the God of Nature, who is as inflexible as Nature itself. You might as well say that the laws of nature are whatever we imagine them to be. But we do not go far before we find that, instead of being pliant to our will, they are rigid and inexorable, and we dash ourselves against them to our own destruction. So God does not bend to human thought any more than to human will. The more we study Him, the more we find that He is *not* what we imagined Him to be; that He is far greater than any image of Him that we could frame.

But, after all, you rejoin that the conception of a Supreme Being is merely an abstract idea, of no practical importance, with no bearing upon human life. I answer, it is of immeasurable importance. Let go the idea of God, and you have let go the highest moral restraint. There is no Ruler above man; he is a law unto himself—a law which is as impotent to produce order, and to hold society together, as man is with his little hands to hold the stars in their courses.

I know how you reason against the Divine existence from the moral disorder of the world. The argument is one that takes strong hold of the imagination, and may be used with tremendous effect. You set forth in colors none too strong the injustice that prevails in the relations of men to one another—the inequalities of society; the haughtiness of the rich and the misery of the poor; you draw lurid pictures of the vice and crime which run riot in the great capitals which are the centres of civilization; and when

you have wound up your audience to the highest pitch, you ask, "How can it be that there is a just God in heaven, who looks down upon the earth and sees all this horrible confusion, and yet does not lift His hand to avenge the innocent or punish the guilty?" To this I will make but one answer: Does it convince yourself? I do not mean to imply that you are conscious of insincerity. But an orator is sometimes carried away by his own eloquence, and states things more strongly than he would in his cooler moments. So I venture to ask: With all your tendency to skepticism, do you really believe that there is no moral government of the world—no Power behind nature "making for righteousness?" Are there no retributions in history? When Lincoln stood on the field of Gettysburg, so lately drenched with blood, and, reviewing the carnage of that terrible day, accepted it as the punishment of our national sins, was it a mere theatrical flourish in him to lift his hand to heaven, and exclaim, "Just and true are Thy ways, Lord God Almighty!"

Having settled it to your own satisfaction that there is no God, you proceed in the same easy way to dispose of that other belief which lies at the foundation of all religion—the immortality of the soul. With an air of modesty and diffidence that would carry an audience by storm, you confess your ignorance of what perhaps others are better acquainted with, when you say, "This world is all that *I* know anything about, *so far as I recollect.*" This is very wittily put, and some may suppose it contains an argument; but do you really mean to say that you do not *know* anything except what you "recollect," or what you have seen with your eyes? Perhaps you never saw your grandparents; but have you any more doubt of their existence than of that of your father and mother whom you did see?

Here, as when you speak of the existence of God, you carefully avoid any positive affirmation: you neither affirm nor deny. You are ready for whatever may "turn up." In your jaunty style, if you find yourself hereafter in some new and unexpected situation, you will accept it and make the best of it, and be "as ready as the next man to enter on any remunerative occupation!"

But while airing this pleasant fancy, you plainly regard the hope of another life as a beggar's dream—the momentary illusion of one who, stumbling along life's highway, sits him down by the roadside, footsore and weary, cold and hungry, and falls asleep,

and dreams of a time when he shall have riches and plenty. Poor creature ! let him dream ; it helps him to forget his misery, and may give him a little courage for his rude awaking to the hard reality of life. But it is all a dream, which dissolves in thin air, and floats away and disappears. This illustration I do not take from you, but simply choose to set forth what (as I infer from the sentences above quoted and many like expressions) may describe, not unfairly, your state of mind. Your treatment of the subject is one of trifling. You do not speak of it in a serious way, but lightly and flippantly, as if it were all a matter of fancy and conjecture, and not worthy of sober consideration.

Now, does it never occur to you that there is something very cruel in this treatment of the belief of your fellow-creatures, on whose hope of another life hangs all that relieves the darkness of their present existence ? To many of them life is a burden to carry, and they need all the helps to carry it that can be found in reason, in philosophy, or in religion. But what support does your hollow creed supply ? You are a man of warm heart, of the tenderest sympathies. Those who know you best and love you most, tell me that you cannot bear the sight of suffering even in animals ; that your natural sensibility is such that you find no pleasure in sports, in hunting or fishing ; to shoot a robin would make you feel like a murderer. If you see a poor man in trouble your first impulse is to help him. You cannot see a child in tears but you want to take up the little fellow in your arms, and make him smile again. And yet, with all your sensibility, you hold the most remorseless and pitiless creed in the world—a creed in which there is not a gleam of mercy or of hope. A mother has lost her only son. She goes to his grave and throws herself upon it, the very picture of woe. One thought only keeps her from despair : it is that beyond this life there is a world where she may once more clasp her boy in her arms. What will you say to that mother ? You are silent, and your silence is a sentence of death to her hopes. By that grave you cannot speak : for if you were to open your lips and tell that mother what you really believe, it would be that her son is blotted out of existence, and that she can never look upon his face again. Thus with your iron heel do you trample down and crush the last hope of a broken heart.

When such sorrow comes to you, you feel it as keenly as any

man. With your strong domestic attachments one cannot pass out of your little circle without leaving a great void in your heart, and your grief is as eloquent as it is hopeless. No sadder words ever fell from human lips than these, spoken over the coffin of one to whom you were tenderly attached: "Life is but a narrow vale, between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities!" This is a doom of annihilation, which strikes a chill to the stoutest heart. Even you must envy the faith which, as it looks upward, sees those "peaks of two eternities," not "cold and barren," but warm with the glow of the setting sun, which gives promise of a happier to-morrow?

I think I hear you say, "So might it be! Would that I could believe it!" for no one recognizes more the emptiness of life as it is. I do not forget the tone in which you said: "Life is very sad to me; it is very pitiful; there isn't much to it." True indeed! With your belief, or want of belief, there is very little to it; and if this were all it would be a fair question whether life were worth living. In the name of humanity, let us cling to all that is left us that can bring a ray of hope into its darkness, and thus lighten its otherwise impenetrable gloom.

I observe that you not unfrequently entertain yourself and your audiences by caricaturing certain doctrines of the Christian Religion. The "Atonement," as you look upon it, is simply "punishing the wrong man"—letting the guilty escape, and putting the innocent to death. This is vindicating justice by permitting injustice. But is there not another side to this? Does not the idea of sacrifice run through human life, and ennoble human character? You see a mother denying herself for her children, foregoing every comfort, enduring every hardship, till at last, worn out by her labor and her privation, she folds her hands upon her breast. May it not be said truly that she *gives her life* for the life of her children? History is full of sacrifice, and it is the best part of history. I will not speak of "the noble army of martyrs," but of heroes who have died for their country or for liberty—what is it but this element of devotion for the good of others that gives such glory to their immortal names? How then should it be thought a thing without reason that a Deliverer of the race should give His life for the life of the world?

So, too, you find a subject for caricature in the doctrine of "Regeneration." But what is regeneration but a change of

character shown in a change of life? Is that so very absurd? Have you never seen a drunkard reformed? Have you never seen a man of impure life, who, after running his evil course, had, like the prodigal, "come to himself"—that is, awakened to his shame, and turning from it, come back to the path of purity, and finally regained a true and noble manhood? Probably you would admit this, but say that the change was the result of reflection, and of the man's own strength of will. The doctrine of regeneration only adds to the will of man the power of God. We believe that man is weak, but that God is mighty; and that when man tries to raise himself, an arm is stretched out to lift him up to a height which he could not attain alone. Sometimes one who has led the worst life, after being plunged into such remorse and despair that he feels as if he were enduring the agonies of hell, turns back and takes another course: he becomes "a new creature," whom his friends can hardly recognize as he "sits clothed and in his right mind." The change is from darkness to light, from death to life; and he who has known but one such case will never say that the language is too strong which describes that man as "born again."

If you think that I pass lightly over these doctrines, not bringing out all the meaning which they bear, I admit it. I am not writing an essay in theology, but would only show, in passing, by your favorite method of illustration, that the principles involved are the same with which you are familiar in every-day life.

But the doctrine which excites your bitterest animosity is that of Future Retribution. The prospect of another life, reaching on into an unknown futurity, you would contemplate with composure were it not for the dark shadow hanging over it. But to live only to suffer; to live when asking to die; to "long for death, and not be able to find it"—is a prospect which rouses the anger of one who would look with calmness upon death as an eternal sleep. The doctrine loses none of its terrors in passing through your hands; for it is one of the means by which you work upon the feelings of your hearers. You pronounce it "the most horrible belief that ever entered the human mind: that the Creator should bring beings into existence to destroy them! This would make Him the most fearful tyrant in the universe—a Moloch devouring his own children!" I shudder when

I recall the fierce energy with which you spoke as you said, "Such a God I hate with all the intensity of my being!"

But gently, gently, Sir! We will let this burst of fury pass before we resume the conversation. When you are a little more tranquil, I would modestly suggest that perhaps you are fighting a figment of your imagination. I never heard of any Christian teacher who said that "the Creator brought beings into the world to destroy them!" Is it not better to moderate yourself to exact statements, especially when, with all modifications, the subject is one to awaken a feeling the most solemn and profound?

Now I am not going to enter into a discussion of this doctrine. I will not quote a single text. I only ask you whether it is not a scientific truth that *the effect of everything which is of the nature of a cause is eternal*. Science has opened our eyes to some very strange facts in nature. The theory of vibrations is carried by the physicists to an alarming extent. They tell us that it is literally and mathematically true that you cannot throw a ball in the air but it shakes the solar system. Thus all things act upon all. What is true in space may be true in time, and the law of physics may hold in the spiritual realm. When the soul of man departs out of the body, being released from the grossness of the flesh, it may enter on a life a thousand times more intense than this: in which it will not need the dull senses as avenues of knowledge, because the spirit itself will be all eye, all ear, all intelligence; while memory, like an electric flash, will in an instant bring the whole of the past into view; and the moral sense will be quickened as never before. Here then we have all the conditions of retribution—a world which, however shadowy it may seem, is yet as real as the homes and habitations and activities of our present state; with memory trailing the deeds of a lifetime behind it; and conscience, more inexorable than any judge, giving its solemn and final verdict.

With such conditions assumed, let us take a case which would awaken your just indignation—that of a selfish, hard-hearted, and cruel man; who sacrifices the interests of everybody to his own; who grinds the faces of the poor, robbing the widow and the orphan of their little all; and who, so far from making restitution, dies with his ill-gotten gains held fast in his clenched hand. How long must the night be to sleep away the memory of such a hideous life? If he wakes, will not the recollection cling to him

still? Are there any waters of oblivion that can cleanse his miserable soul? If not—if he cannot *forget*, surely he cannot *forgive* himself for the baseness which now he has no opportunity to repair. Here, then, is a retribution which is inseparable from his being, which is a part of his very existence. The undying memory brings the undying pain.

Take another case—alas! too sadly frequent. A man of pleasure betrays a young, innocent, trusting woman by the promise of his love, and then casts her off, leaving her to sink down, down, through every degree of misery and shame, till she is lost in depths which plummet never sounded, and disappears. Is he not to suffer for this poor creature's ruin? Can he rid himself of it by fleeing beyond "that bourne from whence no traveler returns?" Not unless he can flee from himself: for in the lowest depths of the under-world—a world in which the sun never shines—that image will still pursue him. As he wanders in its gloomy shades, a pale form glides by him like an affrighted ghost. The face is the same, beautiful even in its sorrow, but with a look upon it as of one who has already suffered an eternity of woe. In an instant all the past comes back again. He sees the young, unblessed mother wandering in some lonely place, that only the heavens may witness her agony and her despair. There he sees her holding up in her arms the babe that had no right to be born, and calling upon God to judge her betrayer. How far in the future must he travel to forget that look? Is there any escape except by plunging into the gulf of annihilation?

Thus far in this paper I have taken a tone of defence. But I do not admit that the Christian religion needs any apology,—it needs only to be rightly understood to furnish its own complete vindication. Instead of considering its "evidences," which is but going round the outer walls, let us enter the gates of the temple and see what is within. Here we find something better than "towers and bulwarks" in the character of Him who is the Founder of our Religion, and not its Founder only, but its very core and being. Christ *is* Christianity. Not only is He the Great Teacher, but the central subject of what He taught, so that the whole stands or falls with Him.

In our first conversation, I observed that, with all your sharp comments on things sacred, you professed great respect for the ethics of Christianity, and for its author. "Make the Sermon on

the Mount your religion," you said, "and there I am with you." Very well! So far, so good. And now, if you will go a little further, you may find still more food for reflection.

All who have made a study of the character and teachings of Christ, even those who utterly deny the supernatural, stand in awe and wonder before the gigantic figure which is here revealed. Renan closes his "Life of Jesus" with this as the result of his long study: "Jesus will never be surpassed. His worship will be renewed without ceasing; his story [légende] will draw tears from beautiful eyes without end; his sufferings will touch the finest natures; ALL THE AGES WILL PROCLAIM THAT AMONG THE SONS OF MEN THERE HAS NOT RISEN A GREATER THAN JESUS;" while Rousseau closes his immortal eulogy by saying, "SOCRATES DIED LIKE A PHILOSOPHER, BUT JESUS CHRIST LIKE A GOD!"

Here is an argument for Christianity to which I pray you to address yourself. As you do not believe in miracles, and are ready to explain everything by natural causes, I beg you to tell us how came it to pass that a Hebrew peasant, born among the hills of Galilee, had a wisdom above that of Socrates or Plato, of Confucius or Buddha? This is the greatest of miracles, that such a Being has lived and died on the earth.

Since this is the chief argument for Religion, does it not become one who undertakes to destroy it to set himself first to this central position, instead of wasting his time on mere outposts? When you next address one of the great audiences that hang upon your words, is it unfair to ask that you lay aside such familiar topics as Miracles or Ghosts, or a Reply to Talmage, and tell us what you think of JESUS CHRIST; whether you look upon Him as an impostor, or merely as a dreamer—a mild and harmless enthusiast; or are ready to acknowledge that He is entitled to rank among the great teachers of mankind?

But if you are compelled to admit the greatness of Christ, you take your revenge on the Apostles, whom you do not hesitate to say that you "don't think much of." In fact, you set them down in a most peremptory way as "a poor lot." It did seem rather an unpromising "lot," that of a boat-load of fishermen, from which to choose the apostles of a religion—almost as unpromising as it was to take a rail-splitter to be the head of a nation in the greatest crisis of its history! But perhaps in both cases there was a wisdom higher than ours, that

chose better than we. It might puzzle even you to give a better definition of religion than this of the Apostle James : " Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this : to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world ; " or to find among those sages of antiquity, with whose writings you are familiar, a more complete and perfect delineation of that which is the essence of all goodness and virtue, than Paul's description of the charity which " suffereth long and is kind ; " or to find in the sayings of Confucius or of Buddha anything more sublime than this aphorism of John : " God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. "

And here you must allow me to make a remark, which is not intended as a personal retort, but simply in the interest of that truth which we both profess to seek, and to count worth more than victory. Your language is too sweeping to indicate the careful thinker, who measures his words and weighs them in a balance. Your lectures remind me of the pictures of Gustave Doré, who preferred to paint on a large canvas, with figures as gigantesque as those of Michael Angelo in his Last Judgment. The effect is very powerful, but if he had softened his colors a little,—if there were a few delicate touches, a mingling of light and shade, as when twilight is stealing over the earth,—the landscape would be more true to nature. So, believe me, your words would be more weighty if they were not so strong. But whenever you touch upon religion you seem to lose control of yourself, and a vindictive feeling takes possession of you, which causes you to see things so distorted from their natural appearance that you cannot help running into the broadest caricature. You swing your sentences as the woodman swings his axe. Of course, this " slashing " style is very effective before a popular audience, which does not care for nice distinctions, or for evidence that has to be sifted and weighed ; but wants opinions off-hand, and likes to have its prejudices and hatreds echoed back in a ringing voice. This carries the crowd, but does not convince the philosophic mind. The truth-seeker cannot cut a road through the forest with sturdy blows ; he has a hidden path to trace, and must pick his way with slow and cautious step to find that which is more precious than gold.

But if it were possible for you to sweep away the " evidences

of Christianity," you have not swept away Christianity itself ; it still lives, not only in tradition, but in the hearts of the people, entwined with all that is sweetest in their domestic life, from which it must be torn out with unsparing hand before it can be exterminated. To begin with, you turn your back upon history. All that men have done and suffered for the sake of religion was folly. The Pilgrims, who crossed the sea to find freedom to worship God in the forests of the New World, were miserable fanatics. There is no more place in the world for heroes and martyrs. He who sacrifices his life for a faith, or an idea, is a fool. The only practical wisdom is to have a sharp eye to the main chance. If you keep on in this work of demolition, you will soon destroy all our ideals. Family life withers under the cold sneer—half pity and half scorn—with which you look down on household worship. Take from our American firesides such scenes as that pictured in the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, and you have taken from them their most sacred hours and their tenderest memories.

The same destructive spirit which intrudes into our domestic as well as our religious life, would take away the beauty of our villages as well as the sweetness of our homes. In the weary round of a week of toil, there comes an interval of rest; the laborer lays down his burden, and for a few hours breathes a serener air. The Sabbath morning has come:

"Sweet day ! so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky."

At the appointed hour the bell rings across the valley, and sends its echoes among the hills; and from all the roads the people come trooping to the village church. Here they gather, old and young, rich and poor; and as they join in the same act of worship, feel that God is the maker of them all. Is there in our national life any influence more elevating than this—one which tends more to bring a community together; to promote neighborly feeling; to refine the manners of the people; to breed true courtesy, and all that makes a Christian village different from a cluster of Indian wigwams—a civilized community different from a tribe of savages?

All this you would destroy : you would abolish the Sabbath, or have it turned into a holiday ; you would tear down the old church, so full of tender associations of the living and the dead, or at least

have it "razeed," cutting off the tall spire that points upward to heaven ; and the interior you would turn into an assembly room—a place of entertainment, where the young people could have their merry-makings, except perchance in the warm Summer-time, when they could dance on the village green ! So far you would have gained your object. But would that be a more orderly community, more refined or more truly happy ?

You may think this a mere sentiment—that we care more for the picturesque than for the true. But there is one result which is fearfully real : the destructive creed, or no creed, which despoils our churches and our homes, attacks society in its first principles by taking away the support of morality. I do not believe that general morality can be upheld without the sanctions of religion. There may be individuals of great natural force of character, who can stand alone—men of superior intellect and strong will. But in general human nature is weak, and virtue is not the spontaneous growth of childish innocence. Men do not become pure and good by instinct. Character, like mind, has to be developed by education ; and it needs all the elements of strength which can be given it, from without as well as from within, from the government of man and the government of God. To let go of these restraints is a peril to public morality.

You feel strong in the strength of a robust manhood, well poised in body and mind, and in the centre of a happy home, where loving hearts cling to you like vines round the oak. But many to whom you speak are quite otherwise. You address thousands of young men who have come out of country homes, where they have been brought up in the fear of God, and have heard the morning and evening prayer. They come into a city full of temptations, but are restrained from evil by the thought of father and mother, and reverence for Him who is the Father of us all—a feeling which, though it may not have taken the form of any profession, is yet at the bottom of their hearts, and keeps them from many a wrong and wayward step. A young man, who is thus "guarded and defended" as by unseen angels, some evening when he feels very lonely, is invited to "go and hear Ingersoll," and for a couple of hours listens to your caricatures of religion, with descriptions of the prayers and the psalm-singing, illustrated by devout grimaces and nasal tones, which set the house in roars of laughter, and are received with tumultuous applause. When it is

all over, and the young man finds himself again under the flaring lamps of the city streets, he is conscious of a change; the faith of his childhood has been rudely torn from him, and with it "a glory has passed away from the earth;" the Bible which his mother gave him the morning that he came away, is "a mass of fables;" the sentence which she wished him to hang on the wall, "Thou, God, seest me," has lost its power, for there is no God that sees him, no moral government, no law and no retribution. So he reasons as he walks slowly homeward, meeting the temptations which haunt these streets at night—temptations from which he has hitherto turned with a shudder, but which he now meets with a diminished power of resistance. Have you done that young man any good in taking from him what he held sacred before? Have you not left him morally weakened? From sneering at religion, it is but a step to sneering at morality, and then but one step more to a vicious and profligate career. How are you going to stop this downward tendency? When you have stripped him of former restraints, do you leave him anything in their stead, except indeed a sense of honor, self-respect, and self-interest?—worthy motives, no doubt, but all too feeble to withstand the fearful temptations that assail him. Is the chance of his resistance as good as it was before? Watch him as he goes along that street at midnight! He passes by the places of evil resort, of drinking and gambling—those open mouths of hell; he hears the sound of music and dancing, and for the first time pauses to listen. How long will it be before he will venture in?

With such dangers in his path, it is a grave responsibility to loosen the restraints which hold such a young man to virtue. These gibes and sneers which you utter so lightly, may have a sad echo in a lost character and a wretched life. Many a young man has been thus taunted until he has pushed off from the shore, under the idea of gaining his "liberty," and ventured into the rapids, only to be carried down the stream, and left a wreck in the whirlpool below!

You tell me that your object is to drive fear out of the world. That is a noble ambition: if you succeed, you will be indeed a deliverer. Of course you mean only irrational fears. You would not have men throw off the fear of violating the laws of nature: for that would lead to incalculable misery. You aim only at the terrors born of ignorance and superstition. But how are you going

to get rid of these ? You trust to the progress of science, which has dispelled so many fears arising from physical phenomena, by showing that calamities ascribed to spiritual agencies are explained by natural causes. But science can only go a certain way, beyond which we come into the sphere of the unknown, where all is dark as before. How can you relieve the fears of others—indeed how can you rid yourself of fear, believing as you do that there is no Power above which can help you in any extremity ; that you are the sport of accident, and may be dashed in pieces by the blind agency of nature ? If I believed this, I should feel that I was in the grasp of some terrible machinery which was crushing me to atoms, with no possibility of escape.

Not so does Religion leave man here on the earth, helpless and hopeless—in abject terror, as he is in utter darkness as to his fate—but opening the heaven above him, it discovers a Great Intelligence, compassing all things, seeing the end from the beginning, and ordering our little lives so that even the trials that we bear, as they call out the finer elements of character, conduce to our future happiness. God is our Father. We look up into His face with childlike confidence, and find that “His service is perfect freedom.” “Love casts out fear.” That, I beg to assure you, is the way, and the only way, by which man can be delivered from those fears by which he is all his lifetime subject to bondage.

In your attacks upon Religion you do violence to your own manliness. Knowing you as I do, I feel sure that you do not realize where your blows fall, or whom they wound, or you would not use your weapons so freely. The faiths of men are as sacred as the most delicate manly or womanly sentiments of love and honor. They are dear as the beloved faces that have passed from our sight. I should think myself wanting in respect to the memory of my father and mother if I could speak lightly of the faith in which they lived and died. Surely this must be mere thoughtlessness, for I cannot believe that you find pleasure in giving pain. I have not forgotten the gentle hand that was laid upon your shoulder, and the gentle voice which said, “Uncle Robert wouldn’t hurt a fly.” And yet you bruise the tenderest sensibilities, and trample down what is most cherished by millions of sisters and daughters and mothers, little heeding that you are sporting with “human creatures’ lives.”

You are waging a hopeless war—a war in which you are certain

only of defeat. The Christian Religion began to be nearly two thousand years before you and I were born, and it will live two thousand years after we are dead. Why is it that it lives on and on, while nations and kingdoms perish? Is not this "the survival of the fittest?" Contend against it with all your wit and eloquence, you will fail, as all have failed before you. You cannot fight against the instincts of humanity. It is as natural for men to look up to a Higher Power as it is to look up to the stars. Tell them that there is no God! You might as well tell them that there is no Sun in heaven, even while on that central light and heat all life on earth depends.

I do not presume to think that I have convinced you, or changed your opinion; but it is always right to appeal to a man's "sober second thought"—to that better judgment that comes with increasing knowledge and advancing years; and I will not give up hope that you will yet see things more clearly, and recognize the mistake you have made in not distinguishing Religion from Superstition—two things as far apart as "the hither from the utmost pole." Superstition is the greatest enemy of Religion. It is the nightmare of the mind, filling it with all imaginable terrors—a black cloud which broods over half the world. Against this you may well invoke the light of science to scatter its darkness. Whoever helps to sweep it away, is a benefactor of his race. But when this is done, and the moral atmosphere is made pure and sweet, then you as well as we may be conscious of a new Presence coming into the hushed and vacant air, as Religion, daughter of the skies, descends to earth to bring peace and good will to men.

HENRY M. FIELD.